THE ARTS

Reality Bites, but surprisingly, comedy doesn't

REALITY BITES
Starring Winona Ryder, Ethan Hawke, Ben Stiller, Janeane Garofalo, Swoosie Kurtz, Joe Don Baker, and John Mahoney. Directed by Ben Stiller. Written by Helen Childress.

By Gretchen Koot

H e's something truly amazing: a comedy about love and life for post-Baby Boomers. The movie opens with Leilani (Winona Ryder) giving her valedictory address to her college class. She promises her fellow graduates what will happen with the plot will revolve around who's sleeping with whom or who wants to be sleeping with whom. Admittedly while two of the characters are played by Winona Ryder and Ethan Hawke, this might still make for a worthwhile viewing experience. But sex is not what this movie is about. It's about trying to find your voice, to find out what is important to you. This is no easy task, for a member of a generation in the shadow of the baby boomers.

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Fortunately, all the people in the position to be mentors in this movie are too self-absorbed to do so. So one of the things I learned at the talk show studio editing her documentary when her boss, Grant, walks in. He leaves part of the wise, benevolent grandfather. He has the distinguished gray hair and, at least while on camera, the friendly smile. But he gracefully rehearses Leilani's attempts to get him to review her work. When the show ends background information about one of his guests, he just shrugs at her and says, "I guess we'll figure those questions out." And so we're left behind the facade. Grant is just there to look grandmotherly for the camera and, so, Leilani discovers, she is on her own.

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Amongst her distress about work, she meets Michael (Ben Stiller) who is a television executive for an MTV-like network. Their awkward first date was wonderfully acted by both Ryder and Stiller. It is sure to make you squirm as well as laugh. When they later sit in Michael's convertible sipping slurpees and talking, you know that this isn't love but it's alright. Michael's relationship with his boss, Grant, walks in. He leaves part of the wise, benevolent grandfather. He has the distinguished gray hair and, at least while on camera, the friendly smile. But he gracefully rehearses Leilani's attempts to get him to review her work. When the show ends background information about one of his guests, he just shrugs at her and says, "I guess we'll figure those questions out." And so we're left behind the facade. Grant is just there to look grandmotherly for the camera and, so, Leilani discovers, she is on her own.

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Winona Ryder, Ethan Hawke star in Reality Bites, a comedy about love and life for post-Baby Boomers.

JAR OF FLIES
Alice in Chains. Columbia Records.

By Scott Deskin
ASSOCIATE ARTS EDITOR

G runge is out. A friend of mine revealed this to me last June in a city not far from Seattle, Washington, grunge capital of the world. For me, his preemptive statement seemed to tarnish the follow-up albums of Pearl Jam, Nirvana, and other "grunge" acts before they were even released late last year. For a while, it seemed that the greed driven 80's. "The answer," she said, "is simple." She then listed four or five notecards. Her face registers alarm and she begins to shuffle through the cards frantically. Finally, after several painful minutes of panicky shuffling, she says in a wavering voice, "I don't know."

With this crisis, Alice in Chains is free and ready to boldly enter the real world. She has fears about establishing a following and what the public's reaction will be, but this doesn't matter. She is driven and hopeful and determined. What she wants is to make documentaries, so she interns on a morning show that has a wonderful name, "Good Morning Grant" while using her free time to document the lives of others I thought the characters would have about the plot would revolve around who's sleeping with whom or who wants to be sleeping with whom. Admittedly while two of the characters are played by Winona Ryder and Ethan Hawke, this might still make for a worthwhile viewing experience. But sex is not what this movie is about. It's about trying to find your voice, to find out what is important to you. This is no easy task, for a member of a generation in the shadow of the baby boomers.

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Alice in Chains is no exception to the above formula. Slowly (but not quietly), they earned respect with "Freak" (1990), and then "Dirt" (1992). The Jar of Flies (1994) piece of work to date. Unlike U2's Zooropa, which alienated some listeners by trying to be too avant-garde, Jar of Flies is definitely accessible in popular listening, or — dare I say — a middle-road format. Still steeped in confusion and angst, Alice in Chains may not win over a whole new audience from the pop rock realm. But this doesn't mean that this group is making an acoustic-based retreat or is coasting. Even "Whale and Wasp," an instrumental, fits perfectly with the pop/punk groove that the band made their previous albums so surprising. Both Nirvana and Pearl Jam over much of their success to a primary crossover into the singles chart, but are now focusing their efforts toward a more rock/alternative audience. But this doesn't mean that this group is making an acoustic-based retreat or is coasting. Even "Whale and Wasp," an instrumental, fits perfectly with the pop/punk groove that the band made their previous albums so surprising. Both Nirvana and Pearl Jam over much of their success to a primary crossover into the singles chart, but are now focusing their efforts toward a more rock/alternative audience.

In fact, this may be Alice in Chains' best work to date. Unlike U2's Zooropa, which alienated some listeners by trying to be too avant-garde, Jar of Flies is definitely accessible in popular listening, or — dare I say — a middle-road format. Still steeped in confusion and angst, Alice in Chains may not win over a whole new audience from the pop rock realm. But this doesn't mean that this group is making an acoustic-based retreat or is coasting. Even "Whale and Wasp," an instrumental, fits perfectly with the pop/punk groove that the band made their previous albums so surprising. Both Nirvana and Pearl Jam over much of their success to a primary crossover into the singles chart, but are now focusing their efforts toward a more rock/alternative audience.

Jar of Flies. 1105 Mass Ave, 11A Cambridge, MA 02138

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